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Art of James Branch Cabell



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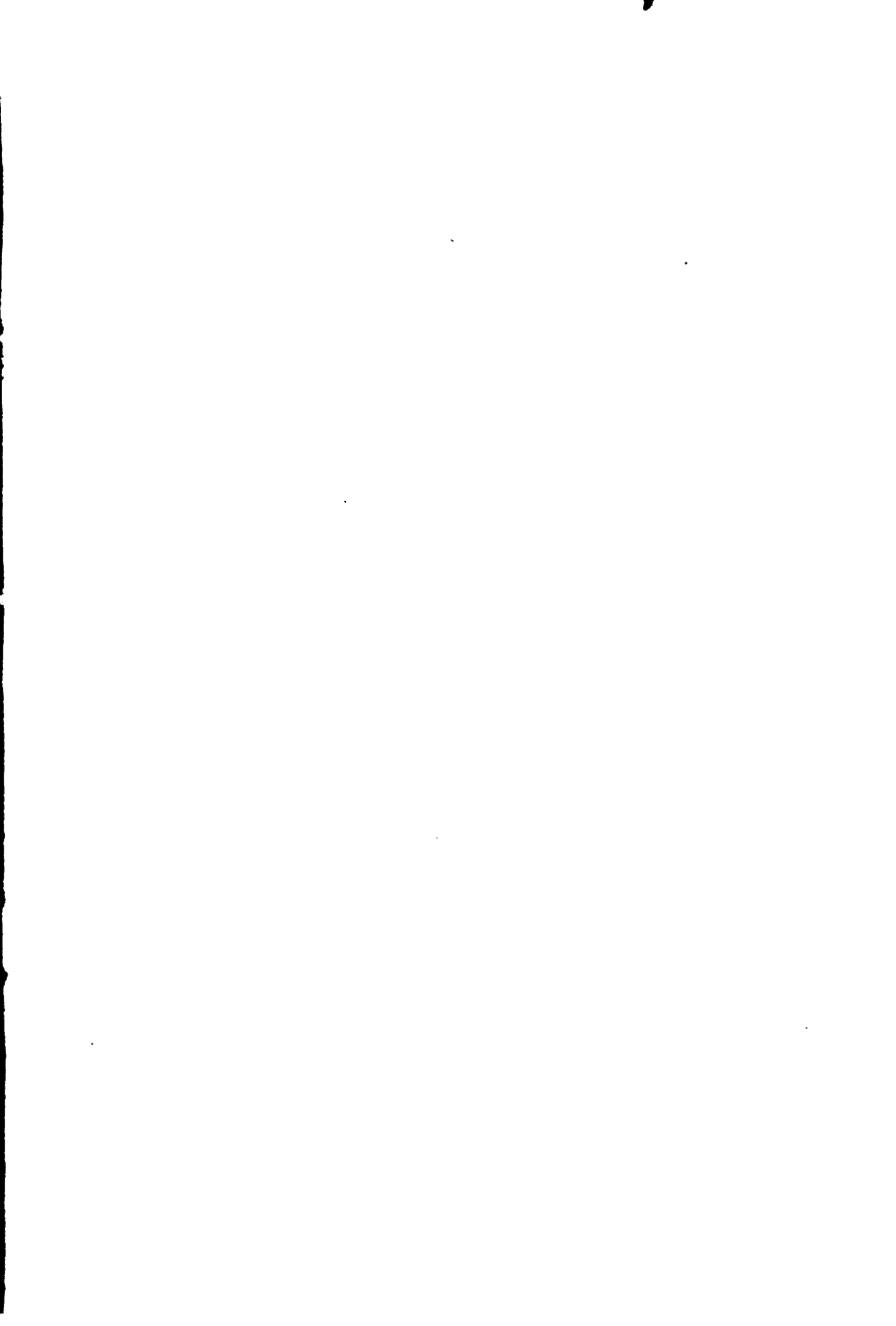
THE ART  
*of*  
JAMES BRANCH CABELL

*By*  
Hugh Walpole











James Branch Cabell

# THE ART OF JAMES BRANCH CABELL

*By*  
HUGH WALPOLE

WITH AN APPENDIX OF INDIVIDUAL  
COMMENT UPON THE CABELL BOOKS



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## BOOKS BY MR. CABELL

BEYOND LIFE

FIGURES OF EARTH (*In Preparation*)

DOMNEI (*Revision of The Soul of Melicent*)

CHIVALRY (*Revised Version in Preparation*)

JURGEN (*Suppressed*)

THE LINE OF LOVE (*Revised Version in Preparation*)

GALLANTRY (*Revised Version in Preparation*)

THE CERTAIN HOUR

THE CORDS OF VANITY (*Revised*)

FROM THE HIDDEN WAY

THE RIVET IN GRANDFATHER'S NECK

THE EAGLE'S SHADOW (*New Version in Preparation*)

THE CREAM OF THE JEST

# THE ART OF JAMES BRANCH CABELL

*By Hugh Walpole*

THE English novel has reached in this year of grace, 1920, one of the most interesting crises of its eventful history.

In a sense there is no crisis—that is, no more of a crisis than there was in 1832, the year of Walter Scott's death; in 1861, the year of the publication of "Richard Feverel"; in 1890, the year of the first appearance of "The Yellow Book." In a sense there never has been a crisis, because in spite of certain obstinate and precipitantly determined mourners the English novel will never die—so long as the English tongue is spoken and men and women are willing to catch a moment's pause from their business and listen to a story-teller.

But, if there are not crises, there are at any rate moments, such as I have named, when the novel seems to begin a new chapter in its history. Such a chapter I believe the year 1920 and its immediate successors are now writing.

In England the case is fairly plain. The war has quite definitely marked off the novelists who began to fascinate us some time before 1895 as of an older generation. That does not mean that they no longer interest us—far from it—but Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad, George Moore, Rudyard Kipling, and, in some degree, H. G. Wells and Arnold Bennett, are now definitely accepted figures. We know what they can do. "The figure in the carpet" is, in each case, finally marked out for us. They have staked their claim for, at any rate, some fragments of immortality.

These men were followed in England by a group of writers who suffered the misfortune of definition when they were still in their literary cradles. Somewhere about 1912 Henry James critically delivered himself in the "Times Literary

Supplement" concerning the younger generation of English novelists. After discussing the work of such seniors as Joseph Conrad, Arnold Bennett, and H. G. Wells, he grouped together comparative children like Compton Mackenzie, D. H. Lawrence, and Gilbert Cannan. This started a fashion. These unhappy ones, with certain reluctant additions, were, before they had escaped from their literary teens, christened the New Realists, or the Younger Novelists or the Neo-Romanticists. Until the war buried their youth in a common grave they were estimated with a critical seriousness that both their immaturity and their own hesitation should have forbidden. The war has at least destroyed that grouping, although I perceive, once and again, belated stragglers like Mrs. Gerould make lamentable attempts at some reassertion of it. Some of those younger novelists have already ceased to entertain us; two of the ablest of them, E. M. Foster and D. H. Lawrence, have published no fiction within the last five years. On the other hand, new and admirable examples of the younger fiction have appeared—Frank Swinnerton, Ethel Sidgwick, Brett Young, Frederick Niven (the best Scottish novelist since the author of "The House of the Green Shutters"), Clemence Dane, Virginia Woolf. Books so opposite as J. D. Beresford's "God's Counterpoint," Swinnerton's "Nocturne," Brett Young's "Crescent Moon," Compton Mackenzie's "Poor Relations," and Clemence Dane's "Legend" prove quite clearly at this moment both that no general grouping is possible and that much work is being done in England that is valuable and of important promise.

Camps are formed, battles are fought, criticism is active and alive. The future of the novel so far as England is concerned should be eventful and dramatic.

What of the novel in America? Here, also, there are pessimists. I believe there to be small justification for that pessimism. It seems to be true that the American novelists of the older school are, with the definite exceptions of Booth Tarkington and Ellen Glasgow, scarcely maintaining their earlier standards. Some of them, like Owen Wister and Mary Wilkins Freeman, have apparently said their say. Others,

like Edith Wharton, have been interrupted by the recent war.

No visitor can be six months in America, however, without realizing with an eager sense of excitement the new literature which the country is now producing. It is not my province to speak of poetry or *belles-lettres*, but the novel offers examples enough. There is, for instance, Joseph Hergesheimer, who has received in England a more eager critical attention than any American novelist since Stephen Crane and Frank Norris. There is Miss Cather, whose "O Pioneers!" and "My Antonia" are masterpieces of American life and ideas. There is Sherwood Anderson's "Winesburg, Ohio," and Mr. Fuessle's "Flail." Add the stories of Harvey O'Higgins and Fannie Hurst and Edna Ferber, and the humor, absolutely new, utterly American, of Don Marquis, Ring Lardner, and George Ade. I mention writers who have given me pleasure in the six months of my stay here; there must be many others whose work limitations of time have hindered me from approaching. Here, at any rate, is sufficient challenge to any pessimist, and such critics as H. L. Mencken, Burton Rascoe, Francis Hackett, and others are making the challenge sufficiently audible. There is a new American fiction—fiction that has burst the sentimental bonds that so long bound it. Foreigners need no longer hesitate in despair between the slushy stupidity of the imbecile Far Western story and the innocent melodramatics of the New York chronicle. Here is now God's plenty at last, and it will be a happy thing for the world outside when the full discovery of this is made.

There is also James Branch Cabell. No one travelling around the United States of America during these last months, no one at least who is interested in literature, can escape the persistent echo of that name. It may be since the stupid and entirely ludicrous censorship of "Jurgen" that Mr. Cabell has floated into a new world of discussion. I don't know. I am definitely speaking of the period anterior to that censorship. I had not been two weeks in the United States before someone said to me: "Well, at any rate, there is Cabell." That was a new name to me. I was given "Beyond Life" to read. My excitement during the discovery of that perverse



and eloquent testament was one of the happiest moments of my American stay. I spent then a wild and eccentric search after his earlier masterpieces. Inside the cover of "Beyond Life" there were the titles of no less than fourteen books. I could see from the one which I held in my hand that Mr. Cabell was no careless writer. He had been writing then for many years and he was unobtainable! "No, he has never had any success," a bookseller told me. "No one ever asks for his books."

That situation is now changed. There are, I imagine, a great many more persons in the United States of America asking for "Jurgen" than are likely to obtain it. That good, at any rate, an idiotic censorship has done.

I have now, after six months' hard work, secured all the works of James Branch Cabell save only the records of his Virginian ancestors and relations, the chronicle of whose nativities and mortalities is not intended for a visiting stranger. I have read them all, and I am amazed that this remarkable and original talent has been at America's service for nearly twenty years, its patient waiting entirely unrewarded whether by the public or the critics or even the superior cranks.

Let it be said at once that Cabell's art will always be a sign for hostilities. Not only will he remain, in all probability, forever alien to the general public, but he will also, I suspect, be to the end of time a cause for division among cultivated and experienced readers.

His style is also at once a battleground. It is the easiest thing in the world to denounce it as affected, perverse, unnatural, and forced. It would be at once an artificial style were it not entirely natural to the man. Anyone who reads the books in their chronological sequence will perceive the first diffident testing of it in such early works as "Chivalry" and "Gallantry"; then the acquiescence in it, as though the writer said to himself—"Well, this is what I am—I will rebel against it no longer"; and the final triumphant perfection of it in "Beyond Life" and "Jurgen."

Mr. Cabell began to write when the romantic movement

was in full swing. Stevenson had left behind him a fine crop of cloak and sword artifices. These were the days of Crockett and Weyman. Of "When Knighthood was in Flower," of "The Heart of Princess Osra," of "Richard Carvel," and "Janice Meredith," and finally of "The Forest Lovers." In the fierce swing back towards realism that followed we were carried, it may be, too far in the opposite direction. It is probable that Cabell was conscious in the very beginning of this impending reaction. In both "Chivalry" and "Gallantry" there is a note of irony far indeed from the innocent sentimentalities of his romantic competitors, but it is, as yet, irony very slightly enforced. "Chivalry" need not detain us, although it seems most strange that there were so few readers of that volume to detect in the swing of the prose, the brilliance of the coloring, and the gay movement of the figures something exceptional and arresting.

"Gallantry" is a more serious affair. At first sight, with its "Proems" and pictures by Howard Pyle and "Explicits" and the rest, it seems to be of the Maurice Hewlett school. Cabell has inherited these paraphernalia, and it looks now as though he will always retain them. A kind of defiant flag flung against the camp of the realists—irritating them, indeed, quite as sufficiently as the author can ever have expected.

"Gallantry" is in its inception a string of stories about the Jacobean period in England and France. It has all the right furniture; the masculine heroine scorning the effeminate hero, the eavesdropping behind screens, the duel in the woods, the magnanimous man of iron, the flippant exquisite, the last moment's rescue. Cabell uses these with a delightful gusto, but they are old tricks, and some of them are allowed a too frequent repetition. Nevertheless, here for the first time some of the author's peculiar gifts are apparent. The stories are quite definitely independent, with the very slightest links connecting them, and yet, in these links and in the abundant and amusingly mock serious politics scattered about the pages, there is Cabell's first hint to the reader that he is building something more than a merely imposing erection.

If the reader will follow all the stories in the volume in their given sequence, he will gradually perceive that a world of politics and permanent history is passing before him, and behind this world there is a deeper world still, a world that has no boundary of material time, a background against which the figures of the mythology of Greece and Rome and Egypt and the Middle Ages, of the eighteenth century and the twentieth, mingle with equal sight and equal blindness.

The two chief masculine figures of these tales, the Duke of Ormskirk and the dastardly Vanringham, demonstrate the first placing upon the stage of Cabell's two dominant actors. These figures are recurrent through all the later books, and I have heard it urged in adverse criticism that the author is monotonous in his use of them. I believe the exact opposite to be the truer judgment. The author, as is apparent in his later inclusion of all his novels under the single term "Biography," is engaged in the history of the human soul. His books, the reader gradually perceives, are simply varying chapters of the Wandering Jew. He may appear as Ormskirk or Vanringham, as Wycherley or Pope or Sheridan, as Jurgen or Falstaff, as the modern Charteris or Felix Kennaston; behind the ephemeral body the features of the longing, searching, questing soul are the same. There is here, as I think there has never so deliberately been in the work of any single novelist before, the history of an eternal, ceaseless quest.

So soon as the reader discovers this intention, the books fall quite simply into line. From "The Soul of Melicent," one of the most beautiful and moving of the books, to "The Rivet in Grandfather's Neck," the most modern of the novels, it is scarcely so much a series of stories as a succession of instalments in one long history. The volume of tales known as "The Certain Hour" gives this most plainly. Outwardly and for the casual reader, these are stories concerned with the hour when the poet comes into sudden, flashing, blinding contact with beauty. From the mists and bizarre splendors of the Middle Ages, through the Elizabethan seventeenth

and the Queen Anne eighteenth centuries, through the humors of Sheridan and nineteenth-century Grub Street to the modern Virginian world the poet's quest of beauty persists, hoping, suddenly exultant, ultimately defeated. The stories are told with varying success. The Shakespeare story, like all Shakespeare stories, is disappointing; the Sheridan episode definitely poor; the Herrick chronicle, to one reader at any rate, puzzling and obscure. But the two mediaeval histories are excellent, the Wycherley comedy delightful, and the Pope adventure surely one of the best short stories in the English language. "The Certain Hour" is, I believe, the only book by Mr. Cabell yet published in England. It fell, I am informed, dead at its birth. Was there not a single critic in England aware of that chronicle of Mr. Pope's love affair, and were the bookshops of London and Edinburgh so overloaded with masterpieces that there was no room for a new one? And, more serious thought, are we now missing, year by year, other books that would do credit to our literary history? And yet I am told continually that never has there been a time when original talent was so easily recognized. I wonder.

The most casual reader, at the close of "The Certain Hour," must feel that he has been reading something more than a series of pleasant stories. Mr. Charteris, dreaming under the battered statue on the green campus of his Alma Mater, has obviously some kinship with the figures of the distant centuries that have preceded him. It has been then a story of reincarnation—Kipling's "Brushwood Boy," Arnold's "Phra the Phoenician," and the rest. And yet not that entirely. In most reincarnation stories it is the contrast of the backgrounds that gives the interest to the performance. Here, it is the central figure that matters. The pathos of the poet, his frustration and still, at the very last, his persistent hope, makes the varying centuries of scarcely any effect, so immortal is it.

"It is only by preserving faith in human dreams that we may, after all, perhaps some day make them come true." This text from "The Cream of the Jest" is at the very heart

of all this long chronicle. In spite of its qualifying clauses it is Cabell's final assertion of immortality. His hero is, after all, even now, only in the midst of his quest.

We come, then, to the modern novels, the modern fragments in the long, as yet uncompleted history. These are "The Eagle's Shadow," "The Cords of Vanity," and "The Rivet in Grandfather's Neck." These three of all the books are the most vulnerable to attack. They must seem to the reader who picks them up casually, confused, unpleasant, and uncompleted. "The Eagle's Shadow," which is an early work, need not detain us. "The Rivet in Grandfather's Neck" remains a very admirable example of Cabell's modern work. It is, superficially, the familiar story of the old husband and the young wife. It has pathos, humor, a pleasant background of modern Virginia; but, when it is read without any sense of the general scheme of which it forms a part, it must appear unsatisfactory. Mr. Cabell is always more deeply interested in the stream of life that flows beneath his characters than in the characters themselves. In the accepted, conventional sense of the word he is scarcely a novelist at all. He takes shocking liberties with his individuals as human beings. He is not, I think, very deeply aware of the motives that move ordinary minds. He is not, in the debased Freudian sense, a modern psychologist; we may thank heaven that he is not—there are plenty of others. It follows that the heroine of "The Rivet" is irrational and spasmodic.

She loves and she loves not, she accepts and she rejects, and the reader must simply take the author's word for it. Mr. Cabell here is too ready to cover up weak spots with a motto, an epigram, a footnote. "This is really not my game at all," he seems to say to us. "I don't understand the stupid female. I have to include her because my Eternal Hero meets her at this moment, but I know very little about her and she is not important."

All this is simply to emphasize that Cabell is not a modern realist. In "Beyond Life," which is his magnificent, unequivocal, defiant testament, he proclaims again and again that he is not. We have had quite enough in modern criticism

of the determination of critics to force writers into some shape or form that they could never possibly support. There is no need to commit this crime over Cabell, but it is a legitimate criticism, I think, that, being what he is, he would be wiser to leave alone themes that demand realism and psychological analysis for true revelation. Nevertheless, the very limitations of "The Cords of Vanity" and "The Rivet in Grandfather's Neck" make them remarkable books. They are unlike any other novels in the English language. The nearest in kind are the "Halfway House" and the "Open Country" of Maurice Hewlett, but those comedies have nothing of Cabell's peculiar qualities and are orderly and straightforward histories compared with these odd Virginian ironies.

"The Rivet in Grandfather's Neck" concluded Cabell's middle period. It is with these latest works—"The Cream of the Jest," "Beyond Life," and "Jurgen"—that he has reached the full command of his talent. Among many true and many false things that George Moore has said in the course of his self-revealing history there is that admirable verity: "All except an emotional understanding is worthless in art." That is so true that it is astonishing that so many honest critics should be able to forget it. But the converse is also true, namely, that there is nothing so blinding to true criticism as an emotional understanding.

I am very conscious of this same converse in my estimation of these three books of Mr. Cabell's. I know that they are not perfect. I am aware that greater than they have been written in the past and that, in all probability, greater than they will be written again. I am aware also that contemporary criticism must be, nine times out of every ten, a case of blind leading the blind. Nevertheless, with the single exception of Joseph Hergesheimer's work, I know of no three books by one and the same author written in the last ten years that have given me so vivid a sense of a new, defiant, and genuine personality, whose arrival on the scene must make a definite impression upon English literature. Whom have we had within the last ten years? Mr. E. M. Forster

ceased to write with "Howard's End," which was published, I think, in 1910. Mr. D. H. Lawrence? The impression made by "Sons and Lovers" was not confirmed. Edgar Lee Masters? To me, at any rate, the author of one book. Mr. Lytton Strachey? So far only one book. James Joyce? "Ulysses" is surely a poor second to "The Portrait of an Artist." Virginia Woolf? "Night and Day" is not quite so good as "The Voyage Out"; it ought to have been better. Sporadic works of individual talent, quite a number; and there are the poets—Robert Nichols, Sassoon, Vachel Lindsay, Robert Frost, and many others. But I am only the more strongly confirmed in my confidence after such a retrospect that no writer, new to us in the last ten years, has revealed, in English, so arresting a personality as has James Branch Cabell in these three books.

What do we ask for in a new writer? Individuality, independence of thought, courage, and above all what George Moore (to quote him once again) has called "the great realism of the idea." All these things are in the three books absolutely displayed. You may dislike "Beyond Life"; it may irritate you profoundly. You may curse the man's affectations and poses (they are of course not affectations and poses at all). You may condemn him as narrow and pedantic and far from life as it is. He acknowledges all these things. He calls his book "Beyond Life," and it is on the world beyond life that his gaze is resolutely fixed. That will naturally irritate you whose duty it is to number the holes in the spout of your neighbor's gardening watering-can. But at least you must admit that he has been truthful with you. His man Charteris says at once: "It is by the grace of romance that man has been exalted above the other animals," and in close connection with this: "The cornerstone of chivalry I take to be the idea of vicarship; for the chivalrous person is, in his own eyes at least, the child of God, and goes about this world as his Father's representative in an alien country."

"Beyond Life" directs this gospel especially towards literature, and in a series of statements, Charteris, the author's

mouthpiece, examining the art of Marlowe, Congreve, Sheridan, Dickens, Thackeray, brings us finally to our own day. In his indictment of modern realism he goes, as the author is delightfully aware, beyond the bounds of truth and plausibility, and the later chapters of the book may be read side by side with Frank Swinnerton's indictment of romance in his study of Robert Louis Stevenson. Here is a piquant study in contrasts. But Mr. Cabell knows well enough that his *Charteris* is going too far; a delightful irony pervades the book and involves *Charteris* himself in its atmosphere. In his final pages he is concerned perhaps too closely with ephemeral literature. Need Mr. *Charteris* disturb himself so deeply over the popularities of Mr. Harold Bell Wright and Mr. Zane Grey? Moreover, towards the last, the crabbed and irritable personality of the little jaundiced author separates itself quite deliberately from its creator. *Charteris*, in these determinate paragraphs, is the villain of "The Rivet in Grandfather's Neck." We are aware of his earlier history and are uncomfortable in contemplation of him.

"Romance," we are told here, "is an expression of an attitude which views life with profound distrust, as a business of exceeding dulness, and of very little worth."

That was never Mr. Cabell's judgment, and we cannot but feel that at the last it is the author rather than *Charteris* that we would prefer to hear.

And, after all, it is in the final paragraph Mr. Cabell himself to whom we are listening:

"We are being made into something quite unpredictable, I imagine; and through the purging and smelting we are sustained by an instinctive knowledge that we are being made into something better. For this we know, quite incommunicably, and yet as surely as we know that we will to have it thus.

"It is this will that stirs in us to have the creatures of earth and the affairs of earth, not as they are, but as 'they ought to be,' which we call romance. But when we note how visibly it sways all life we perceive that we are talking about God."



After finishing "Beyond Life," the reader should at once move on to "The Cream of the Jest" to observe how precept "may be turned into practice." This work, although "Jurgen" is more entertaining, more various, more complete, and more humorous, is the best summary of Mr. Cabell's art that we have.

In scheme it amplifies the machinery of "Chivalry" and "The Line of Love" and reminds us of Wells's "Time Machine" and many another less able fairy story. Kennaston, the author, whom we have met before, from whose works Mr. Cabell has frequently quoted, adequately but unromantically married, finds a piece of metal that transports him, through dreams, back into certain existences. The metal is the Nessus shirt of "Jurgen," the talisman that Mr. Cabell must always carry with him in order that dreams may begin as soon as possible.

In this story there is nothing very striking and, as always in Mr. Cabell's books, the story is most certainly "not the thing." What is the thing here is Kennaston's passionate, poignant longing for the active realizing of his fugitive dreams. Again and again, as I have said before, this longing has been Mr. Cabell's theme, but he has never in any other work expressed it so clearly, so dramatically, so beautifully, so truthfully.

From the merely technical point of view the little cameos of vanished moments in past civilizations are admirable. So often this has been attempted, so often the attempt has failed. How vivid for instance such a vignette as this:

"Again Kennaston stood alone before a tall window, made up of many lozenge-shaped panes of clear glass set in lead framework. He had put aside one of the two great curtains—of a very fine stuff like gauze, stitched over with transparent, glittering beetle-wings and embroidered with tiny seed pearls—which hung before this window.

"Snow covered the expanse of housetops without, and the sky without was glorious with chill stars. That white city belonged to him, he knew, with a host of other cities. He was the strongest of kings. People dreaded him, he knew; and

he wondered why anyone should esteem a frail weakling such as he to be formidable. The hand of this great king—his own hand—that held aside the curtain before him, was shrivelled and colorless as lambs' wool. It was like a horrible bird claw."

Kennaston, his hero, thus pursues through the centuries his dreams and so resolves himself as another manifestation of the eternal Cabell figure.

The physical trappings do not matter. In himself he is less than nothing, in his purpose everything. Of him the author says: "He could face no decision without dodging; no temptation without compromise; and he lied, as if by instinct, at the threatened approach of discomfort or of his fellows' disapproval: yet devils, men, and seraphim would conspire in vain in any effort to dissuade him from his self-elected purpose."

So when we come to Mr. Cabell's final and at present most famous figure, Jurgen, we find him to be a dirty little paunch-bellied pawnbroker of the Middle Ages, tied to a shrew of a wife, of a niggardly, cowardly nature.

Jurgen's history has been accused of many ancestries. From Rabelais to Lord Dunsany authorities have been quoted and emphasized. I don't think that any reader of the book need worry over this. Jurgen is born of a mind teeming with literature; he is the descendant of many centuries, many libraries, many stories and chronicles, but at the last he is his author's own child, original and defiant in his own right, owing no man anything for his ultimate personality.

Nor do I think that the reader need worry himself here about symbols, metaphors, and philosophies. "The High History of Jurgen" is precisely what any reader chooses to make it. It is not for every reader any more than are the earlier Cabell books. Some will find it heavy, some tedious, some puzzling and wayward; and some, as it appears according to the Comstockians, find it improper. This censorship quarrel is an old one, but while the Bible, Rabelais, Gautier, Fielding, and the rest are open before us, and while the latest Midnight Revues are delighting New York, it seems something absurd

and not a little pathetic that one of the few original works of literature that the English language has furnished us lately should be taken away from us. This, however, is a matter of no lasting importance. Jurgen will survive no matter what the Comstockians may do to him. He has the gaiety and beauty of permanence about him; the Nessus shirt is not easily destroyed by a policeman's baton.

This at least may be said: If "Jurgen" is read simply for amusement, for the humor and brilliance of its episodes, for the drama of chapters, like the adventure with Guenevere, the fall of Pseudopolis, the episodes in hell, and, above all, the meeting with his grandmother's God in heaven, there is benefit and happiness enough to be got from the book. Nothing can be harder to write than fantasy of this kind, and yet for one reader, at least, the story never flags, the interest is never dropped, the humor and beauty and very gentle irony are everywhere present.

Finally, it is the crown of Mr. Cabell's work. He is, as writers go, a young man. He has, in all probability, many years of fine and successful labor in front of him, but, were he never to publish another line, he has, with three books, staked his claim and taken his place. Jurgen is the most triumphant manifestation of that travelling soul who remains, from first to last, his unfaltering subject.

And, with the ending of Jurgen's chronicle, we can acclaim with no uncertain voice the definite arrival of a talent as original and satisfying as anything that our time has seen.

**BOOKS BY MR. CABELL**

*In Genealogical Sequence, with Some Description and Comment*

## BEYOND LIFE

(*Dixain des D miurges*)

The row over James Branch Cabell, intermittently breaking out, with gradually increasing choler, for a year or so past, should be vastly stimulated by *Beyond Life*, for in it, instead of attempting to placate his detractors, he deliberately has at them with all arms.

Is art representation? A thousand times, Pish! Art is a dream of perfection, art is a projection of fancy, art is a "rumor of dawn," art is an escape from life! Down with all the dolts who merely set up cameras and squeeze bulbs! Down, again, with the donkeys who mount soap-boxes and essay to read morals into life, to make it logical and mathematical, to rationalize it, to explain it. The thing is not to be rationalized and explained at all—that is the eternal charm of it.

It is to be admired, experimented with, toyed with, wondered at. Itself a supreme adventure, it is the spring and end of all other adventure—especially of the ever-entrancing adventure into ideas. And, above all, let us not get into wraths about it—let us not torture ourselves with the maudlin certainties that make for indignation.

Life is a comedy to him, etc., etc. . . . Say that the Walpolean spirit is in Cabell, and you have described him perhaps as accurately as it may be done. His frequent ventures into the eighteenth century are not accidental, but inevitable. It was the century of sentiment, but it was also, in its top layers, the century of a fine and exhilarating skepticism.

This skepticism is what chiefly gives character to Cabell, and sets him off so sharply from an age of oafish faiths, of imbecile enthusiasms, of unearthly and innumerable sure cures, of incredible credulities. This is the thing in him that outrages the simple-minded, and causes them to fall upon him furiously, not merely for what they conceive to be sins æsthetical, but also for what appears to their disordered ire as a vague and sinister inner depravity. To laugh at certainty as he laughs at it is inordinately offensive to the right-minded, and in the course of time, as the war upon intelligence makes progress, it will probably become jailable.

Yet there he holds the fort, disdainfully convinced that artificiality is the only true reality. And there he fashions books in a hard and brilliant style—the last word in artful and arduous craftsmanship among us—Paterism somehow humanized and made expansive.

I wonder what the amazed old maids, male and female, of the newspapers will call *Beyond Life*—novel, book of essays, or *apologia pro vita sua*? If novel, then it is a strange novel indeed, for there is but one character, and he talks steadily from page 23 to the end. If book of

essays, then where are the essays?—surely these rolling discourses are nothing of the sort. And if *apologia*, then why not an occasional apology? The college professors of the literary weeklies, with their dusty shelf of pigeon-holes, have work for them here. As for the rest of us, all we need do is read on, enjoying the fare as we go.

What is it? In brief, excellent reading—shy, insinuating learning; heterodoxy infinitely gilded; facts rolled out to fragile thinness and cut into pretty figures; above all a sure and delicate sense of words, a style at once exact and undulate, very caressing writing. In detail, much shrewd discussion of this and that, with many a flash of sound criticism. . . . A singular and fascinating book!—H. L. MENCKEN, in *The Smart Set*.

## DOMNEI

(*A Comedy of Woman-Worship*)

Alluring as the spirit of youth may be, it is not possible to admire all the novels into which the glory of that spirit is poured. There is a youth wholly without charm; there is another youth so overflowing with that divine essence that one forgives all its other shortcomings because of it. In writing, and particularly in writing of young love, there is no quality so necessary as this indefinable charm; no quality that brings a swifter reward of laughter or tears from the reader; no quality that is at once so apparent and so gratefully recognized.

Now in *Domnei* I find this spirit prodigally in evidence. . . . Here is a man with an individual style, who can recast and reilluminate the ancient forms and shadows, and make a glory and a dream.

Melicent, of noble birth, falls in love with Perion, an outlaw, and, unable to conquer this man of iron, finally, in the very beginning of the romance, proposes to him. Mr. Cabell handles this queer scene with all the delicacy and deftness of the consummate artist, and makes it convincing and beautiful, difficult as it must have been to do so.

Soon Melicent is robbed of her lover, and is forced to be the chattel of the evil and powerful Demetrios. How the latter is first uppermost in the struggle for the maid, and then overpowered by Perion; how the Jew Ahasuerus connives against her, and how Melicent and Perion, after years of waiting and longing, are thrown again into each other's arms—these contrivances are made to serve—but in how new and wonderful a way!

When the story is finished one wonders how Mr. Cabell, despite the beautiful trick of forcing the reader to believe that the tale has been evolved from old French sources, has contrived such glowing color. This is no sickly effeminate tale, but a vigorous rush and roar of splendid action that sweeps you on to a quiet but brilliant conclusion. A man has learned to write when he can throw in a poetic passage like this

(and how crowded with them the story is!): "She sat erect in bed, and saw him cowering over a lamp which his long glistening fingers shielded, so that the lean face of the man floated upon a little golden pool in the darkness."

No artist can really help one who has mastered the use of words as Mr. Cabell has done. Each sentence is a picture. It is a charming book, a passionate romance that should have an abiding place upon one's shelves.—CHARLES HANSON TOWNE, in *Cincinnati Enquirer*.

The love of Melicent and Perion, brought together from scattered fragments in old chronicles and retold by James Branch Cabell, is a very perfect specimen of mediæval love. The real content of mediæval love is objective, the service rendered to the beloved. . . .

The logical climax is the instant when Perion and Melicent come face to face at last, after long hardships suffered, death outfaced and dishonor endured in the name of their young love, and Perion, seeing in her another than the wondrous girl whose image he had cherished through hard years, is disappointed first, and then is swiftly smitten with a new and finer love, reward of his suffering and hers, which may safely be counted on to recompense the faithful and unselfish servants of an ideal.

The solid value of romance, its actual worth in increasing the efficiency and stability of human nature, is very clearly indicated. . . . Mr. Cabell is more than a very cunning artificer in lovely words and a student of old chronicles. He knows, one guesses, why God made artists—that high deeds may not be quite forgotten, that high loves may be kept alive, that the way of the flesh may sometimes be shown as a sun-path to us, not always as a dull morass beneath the moon.—*The Atlantic Monthly*.

## CHIVALRY

(*Dizain des Reines*)

*Chivalry* is a sequence of studies of the code whose root is "the assumption that a gentleman will serve his God, his honor, and his lady without any reservation." . . .

And what, ultimately, is Mr. Cabell's sense of this way to high individual adventure? It is wholly characteristic of him that whatever guidance he offers is the guidance of an artist, never of a moralist. His one inclusive and continuous interest is in the artistic or poetizing temper—a narrow enough interest in seeming, when so phrased, but expanded by his tacit definition until it is not only the centre but also the circumference of everything.

The duality of the world is essentially that of the artistic against the mediocre; for the essential part of every being, the one part that can turn the single life from a sorry jest into a brave spectacle, is the poetic. The artist in each man requires that he give up every cherished thing

for the sake of one thing cherished most. Under this tyranny the lover, the fighter, the chivalrous gentleman, the quixotic fool, the artist in words, all sacrifice everything to their own kinds of self-completion; for self-completion is the law, and attainment of it the only success.

Mr. Cabell's ideal of success is to reach the consummation of this something central in one's self, and incidentally to miss everything else that one might have had. His ideal of heroism is to sacrifice all for one's own kind of perfection and then fail to gain even that, for this is the one kind of failure that has moral dignity enough to be tragic.

He is at heart, then, a prophet of that austere æsthetic doctrine, the single-mindedness of the artist. He has made up his mind, it seems, to the tragic disparity which condemns the perfect writer to be a wretched bungler at the art of living, the perfect lover a fool in relation to all affairs save those of the heart, and the man of executive might always "more or less mentally deficient."

To be perfectly oneself means to miss being everybody else. Whence Mr. Cabell's two recurrent characters: the artist lover who is an inferior citizen, and the writing artist who is an inferior lover. His tales are populated with lovers who must say with Antoine Riczi: "Love leads us, and through the sunlight of the world he leads us, and through the filth of it Love leads us, but always in the end, if we but follow without swerving, he leads upward. Yet, O God upon the Cross! Thou that in the article of death didst pardon Dysmas! as what maimed warriors of life, as what bemired travelers in muddied byways, must be presently come to Thee!"—WILSON FOLLETT, in *The Dial*.

All the stories are love episodes in the lives of long-dead queens of England, and none ever more emphasized the truth that although civilizations, with their creeds and customs, change, human nature is the same throughout. . . .

All these stories are throbbing with that commingling of love and hate, forgiveness and vengeance, passion and purity, childlikeness and craft, selfishness and self-sacrifice, which gloried in its sincerity in those lost seasons when might was right, and each man stood ready to prove it, to his own and his lady's satisfaction. Whatever else may be his or her fault, the hero of each of these fascinating tales is a man; the heroine, a woman.—*Boston Transcript*.

## JURGEN

(*A Comedy of Justice*)

All the fabulous loveliness that has drugged men with rapture and death returns in the magic of Jurgen: Guenevere in a robe of flame colored silk; the pallid charm of Queen Sylvia Tereu vanishing at the cock's crow; Anaitis, in Cogaigne, drawing desire into shuddering ecstasies



of sensation; a brown and dimpled Hamadryad; Dolores of Philistia, beautiful as a hawk, but tenderer in the cloak of night; Florimel—in a quiet cleft by the Sea of Blood—who knew what to do with small unchristened children; and Phyllis, Satan's wife, an enchanting slip of devilishness with the wings of a bat.

They sway and smile with half closed eyes, and beckon; naked limbs slide from under embroidery and breasts are bare as the moon; perfumed sights float from the scarlet flames of their mouths. They drift on a higher nebulous cloud, but below them are the evil obscenities of hell, a blackness with the reflections of coppery embers, the gleam of red eyes, the swift passage and repassage of unutterable things with thickly dripping fingers and members of stone.

The gauzy drapery of Anaitis, opening in twenty-two places, flows into the murk, while her crown of coral is held in the half light; but far above her is the white and gold immortality, the airy shape of men's eternal longing, Helen of Troy. Palpable, yet forever beyond attainment, visible in the manner of an irradiated dream, she gazes downward with a tender loveliness of veiled eyes. She is the supreme celestial incentive, the guarded secret, of men fast in the corruption of flesh, of Anaitis, but with their faces desperately lifted to the perfection of beauty.

However—and here is the potency of Mr. Cabell's magic—there is reach on reach above even the purity of the Trojan Helen . . . up, up to the part of Heaven which smelt of mignonette, with a starling singing. And at the end, at the dissolving of the vapors, while the pits of hell and painted rosy flesh are consumed, when desire has died of satiety, there is the reality of Lisa, the transcending sanity of human companionship, the goodness of the heart and the peace, the wisdom, of understanding.

The enchantment of Jurgen, conveyed in pulp and ink, rising from the gold vessel of Mr. Cabell's imagination, is both a figment and a reality; the gesture of a hand, the shrill or bland pitch of a voice, holds all of life, the belly and the instinct of propagation are the mechanical gods of existence; and, at the same time, they are less than nothing; for the amazing jangle of fate, of chance, has its sweep not from the simple needs of animals but from the tyranny of that vision of the flawless Helen, the shining of the farther ineffable blueness.

The actuality of to-day, authentic history, is solid with fact and reality, but it is no more potent, no more inwoven in the heart, than the myths and legends of before Sumeria. Jurgen riding on a centaur into the past is fantastic, yet compared with the journeyings of the mind, the dark corridors and lands and beasts of thought, it is all as ordinary as any street of the present. And as long as men are touched with hopes beyond their reach they will see back of any woman a universal changeless mystery of desire, at once pure and possessed.—JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER, in *The New York Sun*.

## THE LINE OF LOVE

(*Dizain des Mariages*)

Like Aucassin and Nicolette, Mr. Cabell's story is now told in prose and now in poetry, the poetry coming from the mouths of love-lorn troubadours or of that "sad, bad, glad, mad" poet of "Paris town," François Villon. To what extent these chansons, lais and virelais are translations from the old French, done with the finest flavor of the translator's artistry, and to what degree they are the invention of Mr. Cabell, is not a matter to concern us now.

The inevitable sentiments and phrases of the time are in these formal yet spontaneous, childish yet wise, poems of troubadours, and whether they were indeed writ five centuries ago or yesterday matters little. They are fragrant with the fragrance of love and roses, rhyme and dreams, and the potpourri is one for which all who delight in old time romances must be thankful.

The thread that holds Mr. Cabell's tales together is the thread or the "line" of love. From generation to generation the compelling madness drives these men and women on to their joy or their doom, and they leave behind them children who also know their "hour of madness and of joy." It is a love-like thing to have the entrée to some poet's Olympus and watch the impassioned procession of lovers pass like that, and to view their disasters and their delights with an impersonal eye and an unflinching interest. . . .

The charm of those ardent days in which men and women were at once primitive and elegant, exquisite and brutal, learned and naïve, is perfectly portrayed in this revival of old tales, which drift "as a blown leaf across the face of time."—ELIA W. PEATTIE, in *The Chicago Tribune*.

Purporting to be translations from old French, these stories of poets and chivalry, of fair ladies and gallant knights, have in them all the flavor of Middle Age adventure, passionate romantic love and the lyricism of poets who rise to no greater occasion in their songs than the kissing of my lady's white hand or the praising of some one of her many personal charms. But they are not translations; they are not resurrected from long forsaken, musty parchments: they are the children, a very creditable offspring, by the way, of Mr. Cabell's imagination. Counterfeits, one may say, but there are counterfeits and counterfeits in literature, and some of them may under the law be deemed forgivable. *The Line of Love* is one of these.

In the richly colored tapestry that Mr. Cabell, like some Eastern fakir, unrolls before our view, tapestry thick-woven with threads of gold and intricately patterned with a host of figures, the one figure that remains most fixed in our memory is that of the poet Villon. A picturesque figure, whose story has commended itself, time and again, to novelists and poets, Villon has suffered more through a persistent process of idealization than

it would ever have been possible for him to suffer through a plain statement of the facts. To these facts, fragmentary and unsatisfactory though they be, Mr. Cabell has confined himself, and the result is a mixture of poetic beauty with pathetic realism: it is a strong characterization, yet it lacks nothing in the romantic element.—NORMA BRIGHT CARSON, in *Book News*.

## GALLANTRY

(*Dixain des Fêtes Galantes*)

Mr. Cabell's group of eighteenth century scenes has been wrought with cleverness, tact and invention. He is frankly superficial, and paints his pictures of George the Second's England, and France under Louis Quinze, rather in snuff box style than with any complicated probing after the eternal human heart.

Of course, it is not every one who cares to collect snuff boxes, but, granted the taste, *The Casual Honeymoon*, all the adventures of Captain Audaine and Miss Allonby, *April's Message*, the whole history, in fact, of Ormskirk's courtings, form as satisfactory specimens as are likely to be manufactured at the present day. Moreover, in the plots, counter plots, and intrigues, there is a grateful amount of lively movement.

Unlike Thomas Hardy (in his biting eighteenth century studies) or Maurice Hewlett, Mr. Cabell does not attempt to reconstruct character, to create trenchant personalities. He busies himself about the satin-clad courtier, the airy fine lady, and the gallant. His miniatures are careful: though the touch is so light, the style seldom halts, and in the few instances where it lapses from that of his chosen period, it at least never ceases to be properly suited to the bloody or amorous minuets through which his puppets are stepping.

In fact (never losing sight of the scale), no more discerning estimate of *Gallantry* need be sought than that furnished by Mr. Cabell's own epilogue, where Ormskirk pleads:

The author's obdurate, and bids me say  
That—since the doings of our Georgian day  
Smack less of Hippocrene than of Bohea,—  
His tiny pictures of that tiny time  
Aim little at the lofty or sublime,  
Nor paint a peccadillo as a crime.  
Since, though illegally all midges mate,  
And flies purloin, and gnats assassinate,  
They are not haled before a magistrate.

This is Mr. Cabell's aim, and in large measure he attains it. If it be objected that life was not then composed exclusively of dispatch boxes,

robbers, spies, masqueraders, duels, and evening parties, without a second's breathing space between, the answer is that exciting rather than commonplace moments have been selected, as better suited to fiction; and not only selected: they have been trimmed, polished, and refined to a version suggesting the school of Watteau rather than Hogarth.—*The Nation*.

We have not latterly come upon a more delightful work of fiction than is *Gallantry*. Mr. Cabell's fine art is attaining a rarer finish as time rounds his capacities. To a lustrous and dramatic style he unites the vivid abilities of the born story teller, and while his tragic climaxes often bring up his readers breathless, the delicacy of his comedy is also infinitely alluring and provocative. . . . It is the best fiction of its sort in covers in many a day.—*St. Louis Times*.

## THE CERTAIN HOUR

(*Dixain des Poètes*)

It is not often that the work of an American writer attracts attention because of beauty of style. That, unhappily, is a quality which our "reading public" does not desire of its favorites. Mr. James Branch Cabell, however, has this attribute to such a degree that, were he not a master story-teller, still his work must command the enthusiasm of the discriminating reader. In *The Certain Hour*, he has selected an idea which requires his utmost artistry with words.

The volume consists of ten sketches which, as he points out in a prefatory essay of rare irony anent the public, are not short-stories. Perhaps they might be described as fragments patterned upon the same psychological situation in the lives of various poets, finding their individual color in that of the personalities involved. The idea of selecting that certain hour in which a man comes face to face with himself revealing the temper of his spirit, is one which would only occur to the inspired artist.

There is in these sketches a wistful and magical quality of sentiment and a delicacy of workmanship which cannot fail to arouse pleasurable emotions in anyone who recognizes the master touch. And as stories, many of them are no less than thrilling, and that without the trickery of the magazine writer.—MARTYN JOHNSON, in *The Dial*.

*The Certain Hour* I heartily commend to the student of letters. Mr. Cabell's gallant and wholesome reaction from the popular school of "vital" fiction carries him, I think, into self-conscious perversities. He writes with one eye open toward teasing the bourgeois. . . . What are we to say of one who calls a preface an "auctorial induction"? His love of a cavalierish past leads him into strange byways of life and passion that are outlandish to the humble reader.

But it is refreshing to find a writer announcing it as his creed "To write perfectly of beautiful happenings. . . . One finds in his pages an exquisite quality of craftsmanship that in its self-conscious splendor recalls Oscar Wilde. One meets a mind that has lovingly brooded over the pageant of English literature, and reproduced with fantastic cunning the color of bygone days.

Mr. Cabell condemns our machine-made fiction of to-day. "Indisputably the most striking defect of this modern American literature" (he says) "is the fact that anything at all resembling literature is scarcely anywhere apparent. The nineteenth century by making education popular has produced the curious spectacle of a reading public with essentially non-literary tastes."

Mr. Cabell does not relish the fact that thousands of plain Americans really enjoy the treacle of Mrs. Gene Stratton Porter and the brimstone of Mr. Harold Bell Wright. He turns lovingly in thought to the days when books were the delight of a chosen few; when the country gentleman of Virginia, after a long day with the hounds, would spend the evening by his log fire with port wine on the table and a spaniel at his feet, savoring Montaigne or Sir Thomas Browne.

Mr. Cabell is really an Elizabethan who finds himself something at odds with our hubble-bubble democracy. And those who delight in the finer sensations of literature will find an inordinate satisfaction in his very delicate stories of the loves of men of letters. Shakespeare, Herrick, Wycherley, Pope, Sheridan, and some others whom you will not find in the textbooks are the heroes of his stories, and in his pages they speak in their own manner and are set about with language daintily phrased and of a rare cadence.—CHRISTOPHER MORLEY, in *Educational Foundations*.

## THE CORDS OF VANITY

(*A Comedy of Shirking*)

*The Cords of Vanity*, by James Branch Cabell, is a brilliantly written story of a hero who degenerates progressively, a hero whom we follow through a litany of love affairs, and whom we leave at the end in a very unstable equilibrium of virtue. The book is one more study of the "artistic temperament," that convenient term under which genius or near-genius often finds shelter to indulge its selfishness and caprice.

Mr. Cabell gives an airy chronicle of the love affairs of his hero, Robert Townsend—a continuous performance extending from childhood to the thirties, although the irresponsible "Bobby" is described as one who has adopted "infancy" as a profession, and never gets out of boyhood. Townsend is also described as one of the self-hypnotized persons who, in the moment of saying it, believes everything that he says, and

thus romances alluringly of himself with no regard to the fetters of fact—truly a captivating liar.

In this "higher carelessness" all his contradictions and repetitions are merged into a fine unity. By playing at emotion so long he finally breaks down the inward integrities, so that he is not able to realize when he is acting a part and when he is sincere. And his sin overtakes him in the circumstance that, having played at love so long, he finally is not able to love anybody in reality. He is punished terribly: "for the saddest punishment of all is something that happens in us, not something that happens to us."

As the author omits to cite in good round terms the moral that we may learn from this story, some people seem to think that the book carries no moral. Now, a book to be artistic must be moral, for life is moral, and art is only life focussed and colored by the lens of personality. Moreover, it is a principle of literature that a moral is preached most loudly without hymn or homily. It should be pressed in upon the reader through the happenings of the story. We never fail to get the moral impression if the author is veracious and unfolds life in the iron law of consequences.

Now, in reading the record of this rather shameless hero we cannot fail to note and deplore the gradual unmanning of this inveterate sensation-seeker, Mr. Robert Townsend; nor can we fail to close the book with a lively desire to have no closer acquaintance with his kind. This is the moral driven home to our hearts.—EDWIN MARKHAM, in the *N. Y. American*.

There is a sort of inward satisfaction gained in reading such a book as Mr. Cabell's *Cords of Vanity*. No one ever talks with the flippant irony, the satiric humor, the fantastic brilliance of these characters. In our more prosaic conversation of the day how often we think of the quick retort when the chance for displaying our rhetorical fireworks has just slipped by. But in Mr. Cabell's pages all this is remedied. Those quips and subtle turns of meaning come from the mouths of the characters as the most spontaneous utterances in the world—and we delight in the conceit of it. . . . For the sophisticated the book will be a real delight.—*Boston Transcript*.

## FROM THE HIDDEN WAY

(*Selections in Verse from the Private Papers of R. E. Townsend*)

Love and springtime were the two great subjects of the troubadours. Simple dreamers, they spent their days in an idealization of the two forces that are still the most beautiful things in life. They sought no tortuous paths of involved intellectual struggle. Life they accepted mutely, and the fair things in life won them to unpremeditated song. To-day

the thrill that lay in their poetry is not a dead one. Although the sun has burst forth in ruddy splendor on the world through multitudes of poems the rapture that held the troubadours still holds us. It is of love and springtime that James Branch Cabell sings in his volume of verse, *From the Hidden Way*.

One who has read the previous books of Mr. Cabell knows that it is ancient France and Italy that have his heart. Naturally it is to those older poets that sang in those lands that he turns. Ostensibly each poem is a translation or a paraphrase of some song of a dead poet, but the spirit of James Branch Cabell finds its expression, too, in the verses. How much is translation, and how much is Cabell, it is hard to say, but it is a free guess that the translator has freely paraphrased his originals.

He finds his inspiration from all sources. Among some of the writers that he seeks material from are Antoine Riczi, Alessandro de Medici, Theodore Passerat, Charles Garnier, Nicolas de Caen, François Villon, Raimbaut de Vaqueiras, Paul Verville, and Alphonse Moreau. A number are attributed to no writer and are the author's own.

It is the spirit of the past that Mr. Cabell is especially fortunate in capturing. One may easily believe that the poems are the original unpremeditated efforts of the authors whose names are attached to the head of them. They are more than translations. They are reconstructions of long-dead moods as authentic and as touching as they were in the days when the fiery-hearted singers felt them. . . .

Taken all in all, *From the Hidden Way* is a decidedly pleasing book. Its quality is unquestioned, and the recapturing of a bygone age is remarkable. Mr. Cabell has written a book that every poetry lover should have.—A. L. S. WOOD, in the *Springfield Union*.

Mr. Cabell makes seventy-five adaptations from mediæval rhymers, Moreau, Passerat, Alessandro de Medici, Nicolas de Caen, Paul Verville and others. In rendering, or rather adapting, these mediæval poets into English, Mr. Cabell has made the art his own. The sprightliness, color and spirit of a romantic age are revived in these poems.—WILLIAM STANLEY BRAITHWAITE, in *The Bookman*.

In a collection so thronged with vibrant chords all resonant of the ages-old themes of love and life and death, it is not possible in this limited space to convey to the reader the subtlety of Mr. Cabell's art. He has sensed the power of the minnesingers as if to the period born, as, perhaps, he was in some previous incarnation. Possibly, Passerat or Moreau, or even Alessandro de Medici, was his former habitat. At any rate, they live again in him, which is more to the point. Whether it is Villon musing in prison, with the rope awaiting him at dawn for his sins, or the Dark Venus is invoked, or Ronsard returns with one of his half-forgotten rhymes, the touch is sure, the craft is ever present.—SAMUEL TRAVERS CLOVER, in the *Richmond Journal*.

## THE RIVET IN GRANDFATHER'S NECK

(A Comedy of Limitations)

If you see on the bookstands a volume entitled *The Rivet in Grandfather's Neck*, buy it and read it; for it's good stuff. James Branch Cabell wrote it. It is done in ironic "highfalutinese" and the impassioned "Southron" will writhe as he reads, even though he laugh at the same time, for here the chivalric, aristocratic superstition of the South is ridiculed with a gay contempt, the worse for its being shot through with tenderness for the victims of the tradition.

How utterly unrelated to and unfit for this workaday world the old cult of "blood" has become, was never so grindingly yet so gracefully shown as in the middle-aged hero of this tale who marries the daughter of a rich contractor and practically loses her because he does nothing for her but vaporize sentimentally while living on her money, and remains unconsciously, ridiculously selfish in his idealism. The "blood" tradition is the rivet in the toy grandfather's neck that prevents his resilience.

The girl in the story isn't quite loveable, but she's human in the same way as her husband, and between them they make a sad boggle of life. There's another murderously dextrous portraiture in the book—that of the autolatrous successful novelist who thinks his genius demands disregard of moral inhibitions; a viler Sentimental Tommy.

James Branch Cabell in this book has done something Cervantesque—there's no other word for it—in smiling a false chivalry away. And it's deadlier for that the writer does it with mockery of the courtier grace of which his victims have ever been enamored in life and in literature, and with the hurtfullest thing of all in a wound-inflicter—pity. A romanticist exposing romanticism's hollowness and sham; such is Mr. James Branch Cabell in this cavalier comedy of acid satire.—WILLIAM MARION REEDY, in *Reedy's Mirror*.

Speaking of names of novels, how about *The Rivet in Grandfather's Neck*? This is the title of James Branch Cabell's gallant yet biting comedy of satirical realism, in which, under the guise of telling the story of a marriage contracted back in the 90's between a middle-aged Southern aristocrat and the spoiled daughter of a rich contractor, he strips the "old South after the war" of its last rag of chivalrous tradition and exposes it, a likable but ludicrous figure, to the cold light of literalness.

The thing is done not only with amazing cleverness, but with fine feeling. For to unmask so hallowed and huge a hypocrisy with such absolute ruthlessness, yet to avoid in the doing even the appearance of malice, is a triumph of the spirit as well as of technique.—J. B. KERFOOT, in *Life*.

Certainly *The Rivet in Grandfather's Neck* is a most unusual book,



and one that does not yield up its significance upon a single reading. That Mr. Cabell has elected to show love as a flame only, and never as a star is to be regretted, but he has written a brilliant and powerful novel, and he has written it with a sure touch, a keen insight, and a wealth of suggestion.—*N. Y. Times*.

## THE EAGLE'S SHADOW

*(A Comedy of Purse-Strings)*

It is quite true that Margaret Hugonin descended into slang—after having duly received permission—and told one of her suitors to “cut it out.” She went farther, she called another suitor “a tipsy old beast.” More dreadful yet, she swore, yes, swore both loud and deep. Swore with a d—, a very big d—; she said, “Damn you! damn you! God in heaven damn you!”

A fine fierce mouthful of an oath, for a beauty, a belle, of the chivalrous South! Yes, already I can hear the sniffs. Up rises the noble army of the poor in humor, the rich in pomp and prejudice, the barnacled with conventions, and announces that Margaret is no lady. This is no prophecy I am going in for; it is an accomplished fact.

Purposely have I waited, so that the chorus of the shocked might rise the mightier, that the uplifted hands and eyebrows might swell the more in volume, and that, in fine, there might go up a more and more astounding revelation of the sadly humorous side there is to this supposedly so laughter-loving people of ours. I have heard more about “true womanliness,” about what “women of breeding” do and do not do, and what is considered fit for “decent society” than would fill a volume on moral philosophy. And all because Margaret swore! . . .

A pest upon these conscientious objectors! They lead one into almost taking them seriously, and that were to commit their own folly. The key to their folly is always to take seriously what was never meant so.

Margaret is not to be taken seriously. She is far too delightful. In that delicious comedy is she not the most delicious figure? It is a long time since we have had so lovable a heroine as Margaret. She is compound, by her author, so deftly of all the fascinations and the futilities that go to the making of the real feminine. To her author, James Branch Cabell, one feels a debt of real gratitude. He has given us a real girl.

And how the serious Sunday school folks succeeded in finding this charming young creature of flesh and blood “no lady”—well, other flesh-and-blood people must give up the dream of trying to guess that riddle. . . . The objector, and the schoolmaster, and the referee as to what is “ladylike” and what is not, are still abroad in the land, and we must all of us, even be we so clever and merry as Mr. James Branch Cabell, grin our best, and buck up, and bear it.

Clever and merry: yes, the man who wrote *The Eagle's Shadow* is that, and much more. He tells us quite frankly that he means only a comedy, but there is fine irony in his comings, and there is true real understanding of human nature. His picture of the house-party in the South, with a young heiress surrounded by a blood-sucking company of persons all after her money—philanthropists, lecturers, poets—is quite delightful fooling. . . .

To detail the story of *The Eagle's Shadow* would be unfair to all concerned. Hardly possible, moreover, since it were but re-sketching what is already the most delicate, airiest of pencilings. But one cannot sufficiently emphasize the charm of Margaret, or warmly enough welcome her amid the ranks of those made to be loved and remembered, or too heartily congratulate her author upon having told her story.

Margaret swore? She certainly did. Read the story and if after that you do not say "Well, what of it?" you are fit for treasons, stratagems and letters to the newspapers.—PERCIVAL POLLARD, in the *St. Louis Mirror*.

## THE CREAM OF THE JEST

(*A Comedy of Evasions*)

I say with profound conviction that you will obtain such joy out of *The Cream of the Jest* as you have obtained out of the writings of no modern author unless it be Anatole France or James Stephens. It is, without question, the one book of the period in English most certain to enjoy permanent favor with those to whom delicate whimsey, irony, an intelligent point of view, nuance and subtleties of expression are the highest desiderata in an author.

While the book makes some jesting pretence to the novel form, it is not a novel at all. Ostensibly Mr. Cabell tells the story of a novelist who finds life such a drab and aimless business that he takes refuge from it and in fancy ranges the empyrean. Actually, it is a series of essays containing the impressions of a sensitive, kindly and disillusioned artist, ever intrigued by the eternal human tragi-comedy.

Mr. Cabell's literary creed is "to write perfectly of beautiful happenings." Says he, "I quite fail to see why, in books or elsewhere, any one should wish to be reminded of what human life is actually like. For living is the one art in which mankind has never attained distinction." Yet with this profession of romanticism, he writes with finer reality than did Zola or does Dreiser with all their realism. He is selective rather than photographic. He omits the obvious details of factual reporting to treat realistically of human motives.

The productions of the modern realists, says he, have this in common with the best-sellers of the fiction counter: they make no demand upon the reader's imagination, and they assume that the reader possesses

no particular information on any subject whatever. When, as a matter of fact, the average man is woefully aware of the handicaps under which he lives, has, at least secretly, a fair knowledge of his own shortcomings, and is decently conscious that all is not entirely right with the world.

Furthermore, the average man like myself has some faint yearning for an apperception and realization of beauty. He is, moreover, able to laugh at his own foibles as well as at the foibles of others if they are not too arrogantly pointed out. And to anyone who can suggest a way that he may forget his petty troubles, short of alcohol and opiates, he is extremely grateful.

This Mr. Cabell does. He is a satirist whose chief object for satirical thrusts is himself, the only satirist who really counts. He escapes every illusion that he may the more easily embrace them all, kindly, knowingly, resignedly. A chuckle now and then is the supreme anodyne, especially if it is over one's own stupidity, littleness, and distressing humanness. The apostle of revolt is the most thoroughly chained of slaves, a prisoner indeed of his dreams: a moujik become a Bolshevik, abandoning a complacent poverty to be a penniless rattle-brain. But, essentially, dreams count. The idea is not to take them too seriously.

All these are platitudes, of course, but they are cullings from what I take to be the point of view of a man who ambi-diverts upon that point of view in the most exquisite language. Even Mr. Cabell's dialogue is not the average speech of average persons, but it has the advantage of being the speech he would infinitely prefer them to use. But if you suppose from what I have said Mr. Cabell's characters are, like Mr. Shaw's, mere mouth-pieces for the author's views you could not well be more mistaken.

There is some seductive method, which minute analysis might yet explain, by which Mr. Cabell gives you a definite, four-dimensional portrait of his characters. I suspect it is because he, better than most men who write books, understands people and himself.—BURTON RASCOE, *in the Chicago Tribune*.

## THE TOY-MAKER

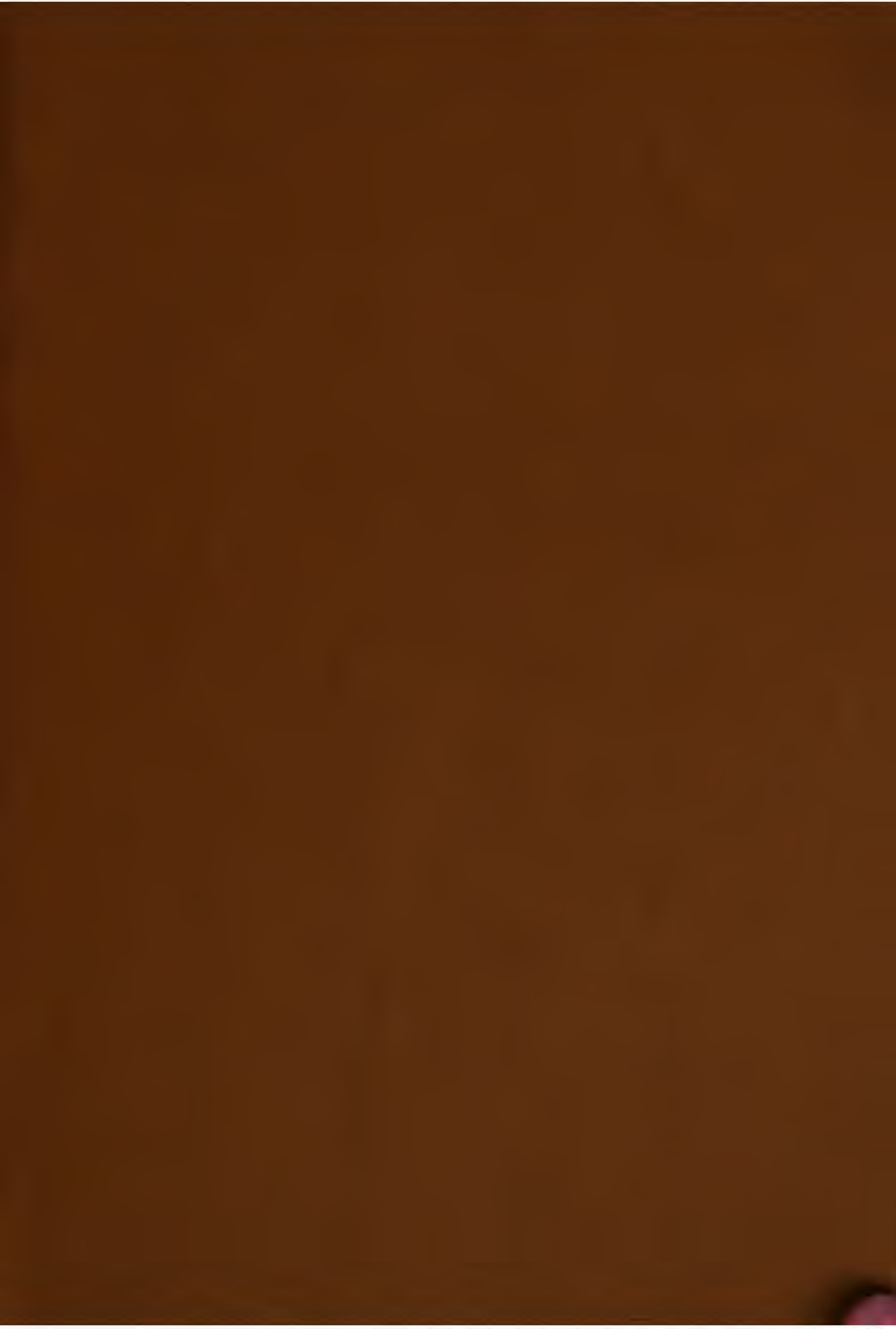
From the dawn of the day to the dusk he toiled,  
Shaping fanciful playthings with tireless hands,—  
Useless trumpery toys; and, with vaulting heart,  
Gave them unto all peoples—who mocked at him,  
Trampled on them, and soiled them, and went their way.

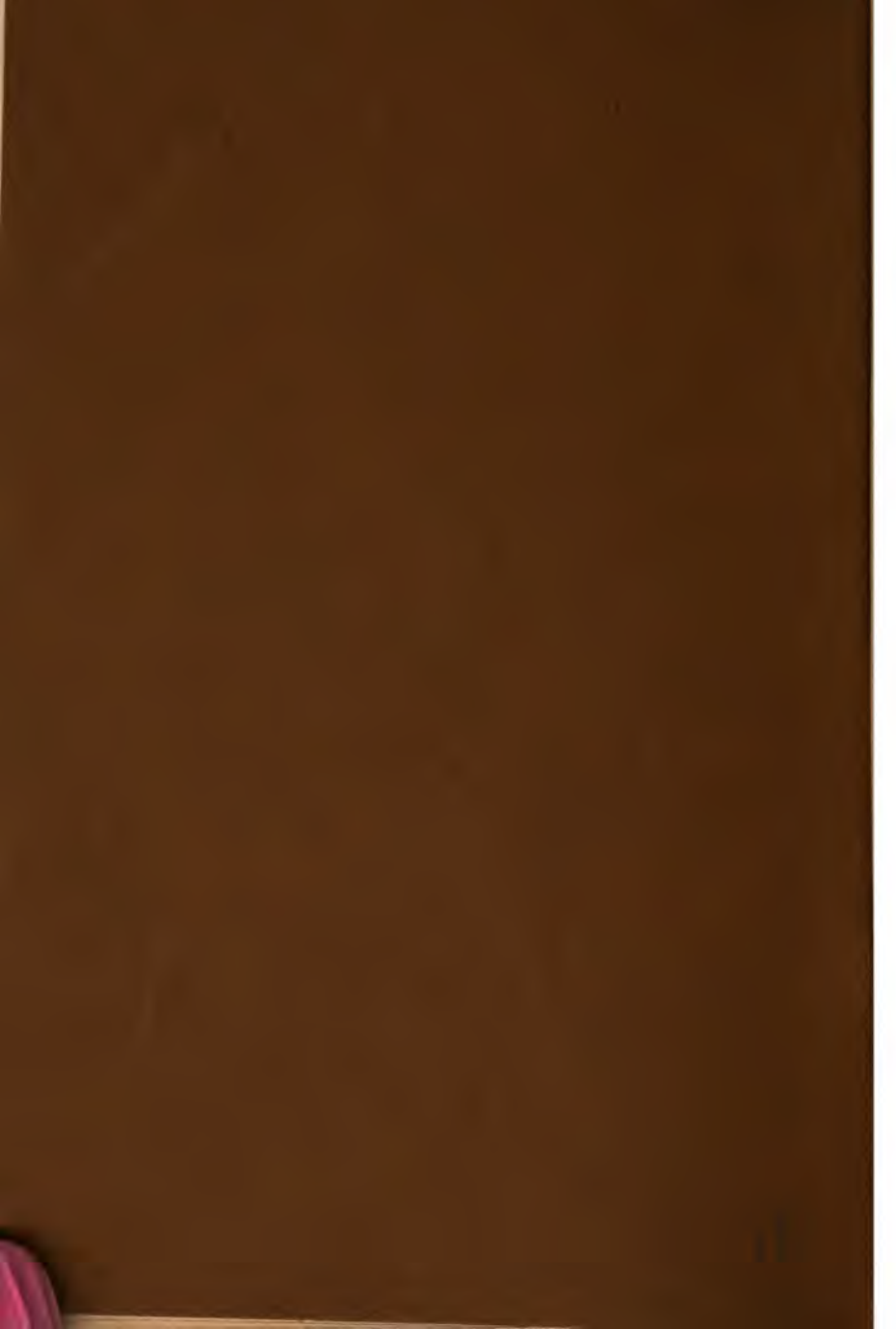
Then he toiled from the morn to the dusk again,  
Gave his gimcracks to people who mocked at him,  
Trampled on them, deriding, and went their way.

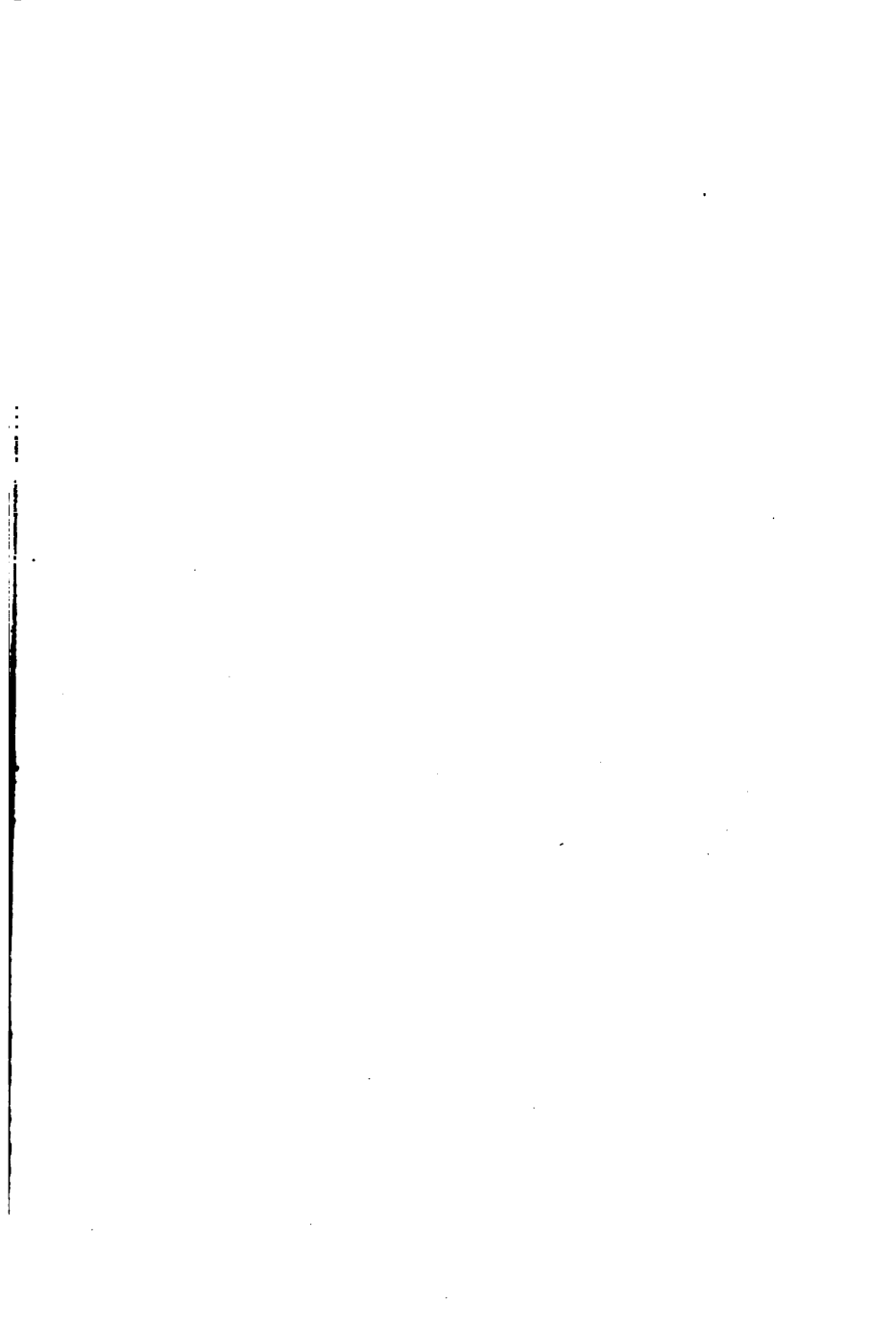
Thus he labors, and loudly they jeer at him;—  
That is, when they remember he still exists.

*Who, you ask, is this fellow?*—What matter names?  
He is only a scribbler who is content.













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